



# Supreme Court of Illinois

April 1, 2016

## **SUPREME COURT RAISES ATTORNEY REGISTRATION FEE**

The Illinois Supreme Court announced on Friday that the annual registration fee for attorneys practicing in Illinois will increase by \$3 next year.

The increased funds will be directed to the Lawyers' Assistance Program (LAP), a not-for-profit organization that helps attorneys, judges, and law students get confidential assistance with substance abuse, addiction, and mental health issues.

Under amended Supreme Court Rule 756, the annual registration fee will increase from \$382 to \$385 in 2017 for attorneys who have been in active status for three years or longer. Attorneys in active status for less than three years, inactive status attorneys, and out-of-state attorneys eligible to practice in Illinois under Supreme Court Rule 707 will not see their attorney registration fees rise.

"This modest increase in the annual registration fee will have a significant impact on the LAP's ability to provide services to impaired attorneys and to shine a light on the issues of addiction and mental illness in our profession," Chief Justice Rita B. Garman said. "I have often observed that when the Court is called upon to impose professional discipline on an attorney for some sort of professional misconduct, the attorney very often has an underlying history of substance abuse or mental illness. Intervention by the LAP, thus, serves not only the attorney whose career may be impacted by these issues, but the members of the public who have placed their trust in the attorney."

The increase marks the first time the Court has raised the portion of registration fees that goes to LAP since 2002, when \$7 of every attorney's fee was first directed to the program. Starting next year, \$10 of every attorney's registration fee will be directed to LAP.

The entire amount of the \$3 fee increase will be remitted to LAP to help the 36-year-old organization meet the increasing demand of assistance requested, enhance its outreach and educational efforts, and establish a statewide presence.

"On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and volunteers of the Lawyers' Assistance Program, I would like to express our gratitude to the Illinois Supreme Court for its support and recognition of the urgent need for additional funds to meet the increased demand for substance abuse and mental health services," said J. Nelson Wood, president of LAP's Board of Directors. "The \$3 increase in funding comes at a critical time for the Illinois legal community."

Mr. Wood said a recent study released by the American Bar Association Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation shows the need for a boost in the funding that LAP receives from registration fees.

**MORE**

## **SC Raises Attorney Registration Fee Add One**

Published in the February 2016 journal of the American Society of Addiction Medicine, the study shows that 28% of lawyers suffer from depression and 21% of lawyers experience issues with alcohol. The study further found that attorneys under the age of 30 had the highest levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

"The increase in funding will enable the Lawyers' Assistance Program to continue to fulfill its mission of helping lawyers, judges, and law students get assistance for these issues, educate the legal community concerned about addiction and mental health issues, and protect clients from impaired lawyers and judges," Mr. Wood said.

LAP was founded in 1980 by a group of lawyers concerned about colleagues impaired by alcohol abuse and addiction. Initially, the program depended on funding from bar associations, law firms, and individual donors, but in 2002, it began to receive stable funding when the Illinois Supreme Court increased attorney registration fees and designated a portion of every fee to support LAP.

"While the Lawyers' Assistance Program began with a focus on treating judges, lawyers, and law students struggling with issues of substance abuse and alcohol addiction, we now find ourselves also confronting the ever-increasing consequences of depression, anxiety and stress," said LAP Executive Director Robin Belleau. "These much-needed funds will allow us to expand our efforts to provide support, education and outreach to Illinois' legal community, while simultaneously combating the stigma associated with these diseases."

Ms. Belleau said LAP currently has five employees, two full-time and three part-time, to handle an average of about 300 requests per year from lawyers, judges, and law students who seek assistance with alcohol, drug, and mental health issues. LAP provides assistance on a confidential basis.

LAP staff also offers presentations, training sessions, and office hours on law school campuses. LAP has offices in Chicago and downstate Illinois in Belleville, and plans to establish a presence in central Illinois in the near future. The Supreme Court appoints a 15-member Board of Directors for LAP.

Funds from attorney registration fees are collected by the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission and administrated through the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. In addition to LAP, the Lawyers Trust Fund, the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, and the Client Protection Program receive a portion of every Illinois attorney's registration fee.

**Upcoming LAP events:** On April 8, 2016, Chief Justice Garman will be the keynote speaker at LAP's annual Joseph R. Bartylak Dinner in Springfield. On June 3, 2016, volunteer training sessions will take place in Bloomington and Chicago. More information can be found at [www.illinoislap.org](http://www.illinoislap.org).